

Testimony with regard to

Agriculture Policy

and the

2007 Farm Bill

Submitted to the

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Chairman

Submitted by

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May 8, 2006
Greeley, CO

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation and opportunity to present my views on agricultural policy with respect to the 2007 Farm Bill. My name is Mark Frasier, and as a third generation cattle producer, my family is committed to a ranching operation that is ecologically friendly, economically viable and socially acceptable to my urban and rural neighbors.

Agriculture is a business, and will function most effectively and efficiently when unfettered by misplaced production incentives or under restrictions intended to serve one group of people or producers at the expense of another. Yet, on a daily basis, we face climate, market and even political uncertainty. Government does have a key role to preserve order and stability, and I appreciate that you accept the responsibility with the weight it deserves. I offer the following priorities for your consideration.

Market Access

As an American beef producer, my most pressing policy concern is for open and fair access to the global marketplace. Nothing would generate a greater economic impact than the opportunity for my peers and me to provide the same quality product to foreign consumers that we enjoy in this country. I urge you to make every effort to work towards trade normalization, especially with the strong economic nations on the Pacific Rim. Domestically, I would caution you not to impose a ban on ownership of cattle by any trade or production group, including meat processors. As a producer of feeder cattle, you do me a disservice if you prevent a valued customer from bidding on the harvest of my family's ranch.

Animal Identification

For months building on years we have debated the need for a national animal identification system, and we are little closer today than two years ago. We argue the merits of a mandatory structure and the logistics of data collection, and meanwhile our foreign competitors are entrenching their policies in place. It is imperative that we move beyond the pilot stage and initiate a national program. I believe a design that is privately based would operate with efficiency and be more acceptable to producers, but even a private database needs to be backed by the authority of the US Government. Please do what you can to accelerate progress on this important front.

Conservation Policy

Agricultural producers serve a dual role in this country, in addition to providing food and fiber, we manage the vast majority of our nation's natural resources and it is time that our agricultural policy reflected that stewardship. Traditional commodity programs that are acreage-based and crop-specific discourage market innovation and ecological diversity. By contrast, initiatives such as the Conservation Security Program are a bold step in the right direction, because they reward responsible management. I would encourage conservation programs that are based on resource health and eligible to all producers, regardless of size. The intent is to generate a beneficial effect on the land. To the extent you have the political will, I urge you to make an historical shift in policy, away from supply management and toward encouraging ecologically responsible

stewardship. History books are replete with examples of vain attempts by failed nations to centrally manage the production and supply of agricultural goods. We can do better.

Risk Management

Absent the security blanket of commodity price supports, American producers are exposed to the uncertain risks of weather conditions. A farmer faces no greater immediate risk to crop loss than by drought, fire, hail or flood. Obviously, not even the federal government can control the weather, but it can help mitigate weather-related loss. Federal crop insurance is an effective way to prevent avoidable economic failure and those programs should be broadened to include forage-related crops, including range. In circumstances beyond the insurable, there is a place for disaster response, and I hope you will make allowances for these unpredictable but inevitable crises.

Research

Finally, no business can hope to survive into the future without directing resources towards research and development. For our agricultural systems to remain viable, productive and even relevant into the future, it is vital that research dollars continue to be made available. Our land grant institutions and the Agricultural Research Service provide valuable research and extension into new technologies that benefit all segments of agriculture. The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program is one example of an effective way to stimulate innovations in agricultural research.

The US Department of Agriculture enjoys credibility and influence with the consumers of this nation as well as in markets abroad. It is in the public interest to maintain a strong agricultural policy, as defined by the Farm Bill. I hope you will give serious consideration to our ongoing needs for market access, for the value created by a management-based incentive system, and be open to assisting farmers with new and creative ways to manage risk. I wish you wisdom in your deliberations and I thank you for your attention.